

MM 99-339

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Magalie Roman Salas,
Office of the Secretary,
Federal Communications Commission,
445 Twelfth Street, S.W., TW-A325,
Washington, D.C. 20554.

March 15, 2000

To whom it may concern:

I'm writing to thank the Federal Communications Commission for proposing regulations that will require increased descriptive video for television broadcasts.

I strongly support the approval of proposed descriptive video rules under MM docket number 99-339. I feel that information access is just as critical as architectural access and that requiring descriptive video would be a critical step in bringing us closer to equal information access for all people regardless of disability.

Accessibility issues involve a wide spectrum of disabilities. As a person who is blind, I am continually frustrated by the ubiquity of information presented through exclusively visual means without regard for those unable to see. Through the use of captioning, great strides have been made toward communicating information to those who cannot hear. Greatly improved architectural standards have removed most physical access barriers for those who have mobility impairments. What has been done to remove accessibility barriers for those of us who cannot see? Very little! This neglect is pervasive in spite of the fact that technological solutions now exist that are cost effective.

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List A B C D E

Support for descriptive video is becoming increasingly important. Having this option will enable us to fully participate in movies and television which are such a major part of modern life. Encouraging descriptive video on a voluntary basis has not worked. PBS has been the only organization willing to provide this service even though the cost of producing descriptive video is miniscule in comparison to the routine production costs of programming and the immense profits now being made by the companies involved. I certainly support capitalism, but when capitalism is used to justify greed at the expense of the full participation of a segment of our population just because that segment is unable to see, it is inexcusable!

Many times I've been listening to television and found out later that emergency information was displayed on the screen. I missed it only because I can't see! Phone numbers are shown on the screen and not said. News events are shown without description. Much of the programming contains action that cannot be followed without description. The solution to these problems is readily achievable in spite of what the broadcast industry claims. Often, the frustrations inherent in trying to interpret television and movies now are so great that I give up trying to figure out what is happening – I turn off the TV and do something else. My decision whether to watch or not watch TV should be based on my opinion of the programs being broadcast, not on whether I can figure out what is happening. I should have the same access to information, whether it be emergency information or routine broadcasts, that sighted people do. Verbal description that accompanies the broadcast does not change the content of the programming itself in any way.

In addition to the obvious benefits that providing the option of descriptive video in movies and television will bring, providing these descriptions could result in other long-range benefits. Such an action could serve as a model for the private sector. At this time, those of us who work for large corporations are continuously confronted with training media that are inaccessible. Bringing descriptive video into day-to-day life could raise people's awareness of its importance and could mean that it would acquire the same degree of legitimacy as captioning. People would realize that its principles could be very effectively applied to how corporate and general educational materials are formatted. This would result in increased educational and employment opportunities for those of us who are blind.

Television manufacturers should also develop a “speaking” menu option allowing non-sighted users to select a television’s descriptive video capabilities without the use of onscreen menus. The television I now use has a secondary audio program option, *but to select it one must be able to see the onscreen menu.* This is not an option when one is blind. Onscreen menus serve as a prime example of inaccessible information. Unfortunately for those of us who are blind, their use is increasing significantly. Considering how inexpensive it is to put talking devices in toys, why is it that no one designs onscreen menus that include a speech option?

Please be aware that descriptive video is an issue that is very important to the blind community. It is an issue that will have an impact on an increasing number of people as the population ages. We are not going to accept the excuses made by a variety of sources that are intended to justify continued neglect of this issue. Those opposed to our fight for equal access would be happy if we pretended we and the issue itself didn't exist. We're not willing to do that. Please demonstrate your commitment to equal access by adopting and enforcing descriptive video regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christine Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christine Murphy